

SUCCESS STORY Innovation Is In Our Nature

CITY OF WISHRAM RESIDENTS ORGANIZE, TAKE COMMUNITY BACK

Wishram is a small, cozy town on the banks of the Columbia River, 11 miles west of the Biggs Junction bridge to Oregon and 26 miles east of The Dalles bridge to Oregon. From an outsider's perspective the town looked trouble free, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Drug dealing and abuse plagued the town playground providing unsafe conditions for youth and Burlington Northern employees passing through at night. Citizens reported loud noises from surrounding homes, finding hypodermic needles and broken beer/liquor bottles among other items. Combined with the low cost of housing and lack of law enforcement presence the small rural town had become a mecca for drug trafficking. The town council members, school principal, staff and parents had enough and decided to fight back.

How did Commerce and Klickitat County Health Department help solve the problem?

Wishram held a Town Hall Meeting, co-sponsored by our Meth Action Team, Community Mobilization Against Substance Abuse (CMASA), Goldendale Chief of Police and prevention staff from both Wishram and White Salmon schools. Police Chief Rick Johnson brought his display of drug paraphernalia and meth lab identification tools. Further community education was provided on identifying refuse from drug production, and identifiable odors.

The county mobilized to clean up Wishram. Burlington Northern provided \$5,000 to install lighting in the Wishram playground area, Klickitat County Meth Action Team provided \$3,000, the Substance Abuse Advisory Board allocated \$2,000 from county liquor tax funds and Wishram town council raised the remaining funds for ten more lights installed along the central street through town to the school.

The County Sheriff, Rick McComas attended the subsequent Town Council meeting, developed a reporting plan with the citizens who could now identify what they were seeing, providing probable cause for further action. The Sheriff designated his Chief Criminal Deputy Pat Kaley and his team to Wishram. Deputy Kaley's operation took place over a six-month period and in October of 2010 seven drug dealers in Wishram were arrested. The first conviction came in December, with 40 months of prison time for dealing within the school zone. The other trials are in progress.

Benefits: The families and community of Wishram, Burlington Northern employees, and the rest of Klickitat County benefited from this movement as drug distribution ceased following this operation.

Results: The playground in Wishram is now a safe and clean place for children to play, as it was designed to be. Citizens and council members report no further sightings of drug-pipe smokers, and the houses where all-night activities and traffic took place are now silent during the nighttime hours. There is no longer easy access to marijuana, meth and other drugs by Wishram school children.

During the course of this investigation, Chief Criminal Deputy Kaley identified a larger ring of suppliers in Portland, Oregon using Wishram as a distribution point for other cities in Washington State. Wishram sits along State Hwy 14, which leads east to Hwy 395 and the Tri Cities and Spokane, and North to Hwy 97 and Yakima. These have been identified as popular drug trafficking routes from Mexico and California. Eliminating access to drugs in Washington is a key objective in preventing drug use.



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Summary: A handful of concerned citizens reclaimed their town from invading drug dealers. Both the CMASA board and the Meth Action team identified Wishram as a locale for a Town Hall Meeting from data indicating a high number of school dropout and drug possession incidents. When we approached the Town Council, we were met with near jubilation. They were ready for help and within two weeks the Town Hall meeting was held and the “stars lined up”. Mobilizing community members, law enforcement, business, school staff, meth action team and community prevention teams proved to be a strong force against outside drug traffickers using this small riverside town as a distribution point in Klickitat County.

We are committed to replicating this success in other communities in our county where the same problems exist.



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